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**USAID/MACEDONIA
JUDICIAL STRENGTHENING PROJECT
(JSP)
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I. PROGRAM-RELATED ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

RESULT 1: STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN JUDICIAL SECTOR REFORM

1.1 Requirement 1.1: A Short, Focused Assessment, Baseline Survey, and Resulting Action Plan on Justice Sector LPAs and CSOs, and the Role they can play in Strengthening the Rule of Law in Macedonia

The Judicial Strengthening Project (JSP) fulfilled Requirement 1.1 during its first two years of implementation.

1.2 Requirement 1.2: Per the Findings of Requirement 1.1, the Capacity of at Least Two Judicial Sector Professional Associations are Improved

Per the findings of Requirement 1.1, JSP designed, delivered, and completed a training program to build the capacities of the Macedonian Judges Association (MJA), Court Administrators Association (CAA), and other legal professional associations (LPAs), as well as civil society organizations (CSOs). The sections below outline the follow-up activities and events carried out during August 2015 that built on the implementation of the training program.

1.2.1 Broad-Based Coalition of LPAs

Public discussion on ROL perceptions in MK

On October 14, with JSP support, the Rule of Law Council (ROLC) organized a public discussion on the role of the Macedonian NGO sector in preserving and enhancing the rule of law in Macedonia. This public discussion was attended by representatives of 23 NGOs from all over the country, which are active in the sphere of human rights protection and supporting the rule of law. Each participant presented their vision and perception of the role and influence of the NGO sector in Macedonia, and provided an insight into their current activities and the challenges they face in their interaction with the Government, donors and other NGOs.

Support development of Methodology for Advocacy for ROLC

On October 14-16, in response to an initiative of the ROLC member-organizations, the JSP supported a workshop for developing a Methodology for Advocacy for the ROLC. The workshop was attended by 15 ROLC members and focused on defining principles for implementing advocacy activities, the criteria for selecting advocacy goals and the methods that will be used to achieve these objectives.

The development of this methodology was facilitated by Dimitar Spasenoski, local consultant. Prior to the workshop, a consultant conducted interviews with the leadership of the four ROLC member-organizations, in order to conduct an initial assessment of the ROLC's advocacy capacities.

1.2.2 Other Support for LPAs

Court Administration Association (CAA)

Development of three-year Strategic Plan

From October 6-8, upon request of the CAA, the JSP supported a workshop for development of the CAA's three-year Strategic Plan (SP) for 2016-2018. The workshop was

attended by twenty CAA active members in various positions within the court administration. This process, facilitated by a local consultant Zoran Stojkovski, will provide CAA with the formalized vision and plan to continue building on past successes to achieve sustainability.

This is the second SP that JSP has supported for the CAA. In 2012, as part of the capacity building program for a selected number of promising CSOs and LPAs, and under the guidance of local company EMBRA/Mesacons, CAA members had developed their Strategic Plan for 2013-2015.

Development of sub-regulations according to the Law on Court Service

On October 15-16, in response to a request from the CAA, the JSP supported a workshop for preparing sub-regulations pertaining to the evaluation of court employees, in accordance with the Law on Court Service (LCS). During the workshop, two sub-regulations were finalized: sub-regulation for semi-annual interview of court employees and the sub-regulation for evaluation of court employees. This workshop was attended by sixteen court administrators – members of the CAA.

In spite of the Minister of Justice's obligation to adopt a number of sub-regulations under the LCS, none have been adopted thus far, causing a legal vacuum and inconsistent procedures being applied by different courts. This workshop was organized in an effort to address this issue, and eventually ease and unify the work of court administrators, who are key players in the process of evaluation of court employees.

RESULT 2: MORE INDEPENDENT, EFFICIENT, AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF JUDICIAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES

2.1 Requirement 2.1: Legal Framework and Judicial Branch Policies Strengthen Independence, Effectiveness, and Accountability of the Judicial System

2.1.1 Support Periodic Meetings of the Judicial Branch Forum (JBF)

On October 21-22, the Judicial Council (JC), with financial support from the JSP, organized the tenth meeting of the JBF. As previously reported, since the ninth JBF meeting, the organization of JBF was transferred to the JC in an effort to support the sustainability of these productive discussion forums of key judicial branch leaders.

During this meeting, the following agenda items were discussed:

- * Conclusions of the working meeting for harmonization of court decisions on appellate court level;
- * The operations of the High Administrative Court and the challenges it faces in its day-to-day work;
- * Upgrade of the Automated Case Management and Information System of the JC (JCMIS);
- * Commencement of the implementation of Differentiated Case Management (DCM) and National Time Standards (NTS) in two pilot courts in Macedonia; and
- * Preparations for applying the new software for calculating cost-per case, from January 2016.

2.2 Requirement 2.2: Administration and Management Rules, Policies and Procedures, and Systems and Practices to Support a Modern Court System

2.2.1 Support establishment of Analytical Offices to perform applied research and analysis

On October 13-14, the JSP supported a short study visit to a similar office in the Supreme Court of Slovenia in order to establish cooperation and exchange of information. The delegation consisted of seven participants, including five staff members of Basic Court (BC) Skopje I, one from the JC, and one JSP staff. The group was able to see how the central data warehouse system operates, as well as its ability for research and analysis, and for producing various statistical reports, which secures proactive management in the Slovenian judiciary.

This study visit was organized upon request from the head of cabinet of the president of BC Skopje I. After careful consideration of the available funds and alignment with project objectives, the JSP committed to support this initiative. During the previous quarter, JSP had finalized activities and provided technical and financial support for establishment of the analytical offices in BC Skopje I and Judicial Council (JC).

2.2.2 Support development of software for interoperability between the ACCMIS and the Automated Management and Information System of JCMIS (Judicial Council Case Management and Information System)

During this month, the activity for developing a new module in the Automated Management and Information System of JC was finalized. On October 19, the subcontractor for this activity, Edusoft, presented the new functionalities to the President and members of the JC, who embraced the benefits that they will gain with the new system. Within the warranty period of one year, the subcontractor will be readily available to complete any smaller *ad-hoc* modifications or adjustments to the software requested by the JC members.

This module will allow the JC to more effectively evaluate the work of judges and president judges through the generation of relevant reports and tracking various events of relevance for the evaluation process. This activity was initiated at the request of the JC.

RESULT 3: INCREASED FAIRNESS AND EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE THROUGH MORE EFFECTIVE LEGAL PERSONNEL AND EFFICIENT PROCESSES

3.2 Requirement 3.2: Improve Caseload Processing and Reduce Backlog of Cases

3.2.1 Finalize Strategies for Differentiated Case Management (DCM) and Determine National Time Standards (NTS) for Different Case Types

As of October 1, all newly received cases in the pilot courts, BC Skopje 2 and BC Veles were assigned to appropriate tracks by the judges as it pertains to DCM. Also, during this month, the DCM manual, which was developed by the US consultant Ron Stout, was printed and distributed to the judges in the two pilot courts.

During September, the modifications to the ACCMIS related to DCM were installed in all courts in the Republic of Macedonia, and are available in the ACCMIS menu. However, in the pilot phase, only the selected judges of the BC Skopje 2 and the entire civil department of BC Veles will work on assigning cases to tracks.

RESULT 4: CRISIS-MODIFIER AND MATERIAL SUPPORT

Purchase of IT equipment

In late October, the JSP completed the procurement procedure to purchase IT equipment in order to enhance the introduction and full implementation of DCM and NTS. JSP will purchase 30 sets of IT equipment, including a desktop computer, monitor, UPS, Microsoft Windows software bundle, anti-virus software, Open Office, and delivery and installation of the equipment. The equipment will be divided between the BC Skopje 2 and BC Veles, pilot courts for the DCM program. Additionally, one set of equipment and an LCD Projector will be delivered to the CAA, in order to support the sustainability of the association in delivering trainings to its membership.

In August 2015, the JSP procured and delivered 14 sets of IT equipment for the two DCM pilot courts, to facilitate the introduction and use of the new case management tool.

II. PROBLEMS AND REMEDIAL ACTIONS

Problems have been minimal and are of the type to be expected in the regular course of implementation.

III. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR NOVEMBER 2015

A summary of activities planned for November 2015 is as follows:

- Finalize and print in 200 copies Project Highlights Booklet
- Hold JSP close-out-conference on November 20, 2015.

IV. ADMINISTRATION

- Ana Velkovska, Court Administration Assistant ceased the employment contract on October 20
- Continue implementing activities in accordance with the approved Demobilization Plan;
- Finalize and submit Final Contract Completion Report.